How Is Normativity Possible? A Holistic-Pragmatist Perspective

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Introduction

The philosophical question concerning the very possibility of normativity captures an essential puzzlement about what it is or means to be human – inherited into our contemporary discussions all the way from Plato's or Socrates's criticism of Thrasymachus in Book I of *The Republic* – and in my view it does so more deeply than, for example, the question concerning the nature of consciousness. The problem is as old as the Greeks' distinction between *fysis* and *nomos*; however, it is not solved by claiming that normativity is based on, or arises from, human convention, social negotiation, or something similar. That is merely to restate the issue, because such conventional practices already presuppose a normative context. We are thus dealing with a problem of infinite regress or circularity, while on the other hand we may also ask whether the relevant kind of circularity is vicious or perhaps rather beneficial. In fact, recognizing its *inevitability* is part of my pragmatist reaction to our issue. In a sense, the question about the possibility of normativity may have no "solution" at all; what needs to be done is learning to live with it.

Focusing on the idea that a normative context seems to be already presupposed in attempts to account for its possibility, this paper starts from the conviction that we need to develop a *transcendental* inquiry into normativity. Such inquiries include, in my somewhat relaxed sense, not only Immanuel Kant's theory of the categories of the understanding as well as the moral law,[1] but also classical pragmatists' like Charles S. Peirce's and William James's views on habits of action, human practices, and constructive purposive activities, as well as the later Wittgenstein's philosophy of language-games, forms of life, and rule-following.[2] These transcendental conceptions of normativity are to be distinguished from metaphysical theories

[1] Indeed, normativity is at the core of Kant's projects both in theoretical and in practical philosophy.

[2] I am not including Hegel in this camp, as I believe the transcendental philosopher of normativity should follow Kant rather than Hegel, but I will comment on the concept of recognition, a concept with a strongly Hegelian history, in what follows. While I won't be able to discuss their work in this paper, my approach comes closer to the broadly Kantian analysis of the "sources of normativity" by Korsgaard (1996) than, say, Taylor's (1992) more Hegelian position. (For my brief reading of Korsgaard's project and her notion of practical identity, see Pihlström 2005, chapter 3.) On the other hand, Taylor's (1989) notion of "strong evaluation" is readily comparable to the idea of the transcendental constitution of irreducible normativity.

of the grounds of normativity based on, for example, emergence as well as naturalizing reductions, which seem to try to account for normativity from an "external" rather than reflexively "internal" perspective (but cf. Pihlström 2010). In brief, a transcendental philosophy of normativity seeks to understand and further articulate our commitment to normativity *from within* a framework (practice, form of life) already defined by such a commitment. It may thus seek to offer a transcendental "deduction" in the Kantian sense of rendering our commitment to norms *legitimate*[3] – rather than a metaphysical, scientific, or empirical explanation of how or why the norms we do commit to have arisen.

For the same reason, transcendental investigations of normativity also need to be distinguished from the mainstream approaches of social ontology. A key concept often employed in social ontology that we will, however, examine in some more detail in this context is *recognition*. I think of contemporary recognition theory as lying somewhere between transcendental and non-transcendental approaches to normativity. While recognition is still *contingent* in a way a fully transcendental ground of normativity cannot be (or so I will argue), it can be claimed to be *constitutive* of social facts and institutions, or even human personhood. From the perspective of the present inquiry, an essential question is whether the relevant kind of constitutivity is metaphysical in a non-transcendental sense or transcendental in a (quasi-)Kantian sense. I am not going to examine Kant's own views here, but we should recall the idea, strongly albeit somewhat implicitly present in the First Critique, that the categories of the understanding are constitutive of all humanly possible experience and its objects by providing *normative requirements for what it is to be an object for us*. I will try to explain why I am not convinced that the kind of normativity that recognition brings to our social world operates at the same transcendentally constitutive level.[4]

I have elsewhere recommended a *negative method* for various philosophical purposes of pragmatically elucidating what certain concepts mean for us in our lives (cf., e.g., Pihlström 2014); in the present case, such a method would urge us to take a serious look at various (actual

[3] The analogy, of course, is to the *de jure* question Kant poses in his transcendental deduction of the categories of the understanding.

[4] As a first approximation of our main issues, it might be noted that the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights mentions, in §6, the right to recognition before the law – something comparable to what Hannah Arendt called "the right to have rights" (cf. Bernstein 2018). Such rights, I will argue, cannot be the *source* of normativity, as they are only possible in a context that is already normatively structured. These fundamental philosophical issues become strikingly practical as soon as one notes that, for example, the situation of former Isis women and children at refugee camps or of the Guantanamo prisoners can be seen as a state of "rightlessness": these unfortunate people, for various reasons (for which they are not innocent), have ended up in circumstances in which they do not seem to be recognized by any normative system, or to have even the right to have (e.g., legal) rights.

and possible) violations, eliminations, or reductions of normativity in order to understand and appreciate what normativity (positively) is. These may include, for instance, reductionisms of various stripes (e.g., attempts to reduce humanly distinctive normativity to, say, brain activity or evolutionary processes, or both)[5] or populist politicians' (e.g., Donald Trump's) tendency to step out of normative contracts in international relations, preferring something like a Thrasymachian politics of force. Such tendencies do not acknowledge what is distinctive in the human form of life, because to be human is to live in a normative "space of reasons" that cannot be simply replaced by non-normative structures. For the same reason, *human dignity* – a notion I will return to in due course – cannot be grounded in recognition, or any other contingent attitudes, just as morality cannot be reduced to brain activity, for instance.

A philosophical analysis on normativity is more widely relevant than it might initially appear. Its significance ranges from daily phenomena of interpersonal encounters to extremely complex political processes, and beyond. A "negative" investigation of normativity involves, moreover, a *self-criticism* of our normative form of life parallel to Kant's analysis of the illegitimate transgressions of human reason manifested in the transcendental illusions he analyzes in the Transcendental Dialectic of the First Critique. For example, what I am calling "naturalizing reductions" of normativity can be seen as analogous to such illusions. There may even seem to be a kind of unavoidability inherent in them comparable to the unavoidability of transcendental illusion: it might seem that norms just *have to* be grounded in natural facts, even though in a sense they *cannot* be, more or less like it might in the Kantian context seem to our reason both that, for instance, the world as a totality must have spatio-temporal limits and that the world cannot have such limits.[6] Naturalizing reductions tend to replace the philosophical (transcendental) question about the very possibility of normativity by an empirical and/or causal explanatory question about the emergence and development of normativity, and while there is of course nothing wrong with the latter kind of question as such, this replacement tendency leads us seriously astray – or so I will argue.

"Human nature": normativity as a philosophical-anthropological and cultural issue

[5] Analogous criticism should be directed at attempts to reduce political normativity to something non-political; the autonomy of the political – and more generally normative – sphere is to be acknowledged. For example, when radically right-wing "ethno-nationalist" populists emphasize the genetic similarity among those belonging to an *ethnos* (e.g., the Finns), they are reducing the normative (nationality) to the natural (genes).

[6] No reading of Kant's account of the antinomies, or other transcendental illusions, is of course attempted here.

The issue we are exploring goes back to the problem of "human nature", or *philosophical anthropology*.[7] In terms of Heikki Kannisto's (1984) useful fourfold classification of the "ideal types" of philosophical conceptions of humanity, we may (in a simplified way) pose our basic question in this form: do we as human beings belong to an objective, independent, cosmic normative order (*essentialism*), are we without any such order (*naturalism, existentialism*), or are we creators of our own cultural normative order (*culturalism*)? How, moreover, can we decide between these alternatives?

Following Kannisto's terminology, we may say that reductive naturalism "factualizes" any normative order we might take ourselves to be inhabiting by reducing the classical essentialists' (e.g., Aristotle's) postulation of cosmic teleological normativity into mere nature, i.e., contingent and fully natural matters of fact, and thereby moves human beings out of any distinctive normative space of reasons to the realm of natural law. Such naturalism may be argued to be problematic precisely because of its inability to account for genuine normativity, but on the other hand it has at least since the Enlightenment plausibly questioned the classical essentialist postulation of Platonic or Aristotelian cosmic normativity beyond our concrete and contingent human activities (as well as Christian or other theological variants thereof).[8] In contrast to both naturalism and essentialism, culturalism may be argued to be a plausible way of accounting for normativity: our normative sphere is humanly constructed; it is, for us, fully real without emanating from any Platonic or other transcendent sources beyond our human forms of life.[9]

However, there is a problem analogous to naturalism within culturalism itself, because, ironically, *cultural relativism*, an arguably natural articulation or development of culturalism, may be just another way of "refactualizing" the normative order into mere contingent matters of fact.[10] While culturalism emphasizes that human beings live in a normatively structured human world that is largely of their own making, rather than being placed within a pre-established teleology and cosmic normativity in a classical (e.g.,

[7] Cf. Kannisto 1984; Pihlström 2003, 2016; and especially, for an indication of the current recovery of philosophical anthropology, particularly in relation to debates over naturalism, Honenberger 2016.

[8] Another line of argument critical of classical essentialism is of course existentialism, according to which human beings have no ahistorical metaphysical essence but individually create their own lives and normative principles in the contingent (absurd) situations they happen to find themselves in. Due to its radical individualism, existentialism might also lead to a fragmentation of normativity, though for reasons different from naturalism.

[9] This can be regarded as, essentially, a Kantian-cum-Wittgensteinian framework for philosophical anthropology, with the world-constituting activity of the Kantian transcendental subject reconceptualized as a Wittgensteinian normatively structured form of life.

[10] My worries here concern only the most radical forms of relativism. There are certainly responsible moderate forms around.

Aristotelian) sense, this idea rapidly collapses into relativism as soon as we admit that any such structuring of normative frameworks takes place within specific and spatio-temporally localized historical cultural spheres.[11] The challenge for culturalist philosophical anthropology is to maintain as much irreducible normativity as possible without postulating any Platonic or Aristotelian essentialist normativity that cannot be grounded in natural processes. This is, I suppose, the traditional issue of nature vs. culture all over again, with broadly culturalist approaches ranging from Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason (with their specific normative tasks) to John Dewey's (1929) analysis of "experience and nature" and Wittgenstein's (1953) claim to study "the natural history of human forms of life".

It is, in my view, exactly this challenge that *pragmatism* – speaking of pragmatism generally as a philosophical orientation from Peirce and James to Rorty and Putnam, and beyond – has seriously aspired to meet.[12] I have always found pragmatism one of the most promising philosophical approaches in this discussion, as it takes seriously both non-reductive naturalism and irreducible cultural normativity.[13] Instead of pragmatism, I will here shortly turn to the concept of recognition, however (postponing a brief discussion of pragmatism to a later section). Could recognition theory, we may now ask, also be employed to make sense of the emergence of the normative order as such? Or does it already presuppose a normative order? Is there a "first" recognition act upon which the normativity of our social world could be in principle based? These are among the questions that need to be addressed by anyone taking seriously the task of bridging the gap between naturalism and culturalism, and it might be tempting to think that recognition theory could resolve this issue.

Without claiming that contemporary recognition theorists are actually in the business of doing so, it might be tempting to see recognition as a way of account for the possibility of normativity. Thus, normativity would be grounded in acts of recognition. (In a sense this goes back to Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave.) But if this is the case, is there an "original" – and hence natural – situation with no recognition acts in place yet? There

[11] Hilary Putnam (1983) also aptly suggests that cultural relativism ought to be understood as a species of (reductive) naturalism. Both are, in short, haunted by the loss of normativity.

[12] I try to offer a pragmatist yet transcendental philosophical anthropology (with special emphasis on the problem of death and mortality) in Pihlström 2016.

[13] More generally, the three *critical* (transcendental) philosophies of normativity that I am trying to understand and develop further in my own work (e.g., Pihlström 2016) are Kantianism, pragmatism, and Wittgensteinianism. Obviously they cannot be explored here at any length, but this essay as a whole is crucially informed by a pragmatist approach to normativity (as will become more explicit in due course). For a more comprehensive argument for a pragmatist articulation of transcendental philosophy (which I recognize as controversial), see, e.g., Pihlström 2003.

would, ideally, have to be, if recognition were to offer a ground for normativity in the sense of turning initially natural facts into normative statuses. If so, then *how* does, or how did, normativity emerge from such a purely factual situation? From recognitions of normative statuses perhaps? But then how do we know (or how did the "first recognizers" know) to whom, or to what, such recognition acts should, or even could, be directed? Let me re-emphasize that I find these much more important – and more human – questions than the allegedly deep question of how, say, consciousness emerged, or emerges, from non-conscious matter. The questions concerning recognition and normativity are presumably also less prone to lead to postulations of mysterious qualia or other strange non-natural entities that may not seem to fit into the scientific worldview.[14] The Kantian issue of legitimacy, or entitlement, cannot be settled by focusing on any quasi-scientific factual question.

Let me illustrate our problem with reference to the very distinctive horrors brought into our social and cultural world by Nazism. What is relevant here is, arguably, the *Nazis' destruction of (almost) all normative* (ethical, political, legal, etc.) *statuses of the victims*, or most of them at least (cf. Snyder 2010, 2015). Ironically, the Nazis did have their own "laws" and a "*Volksgericht*" delivering "legal" judgments within their bizarre society, but these perversions of normativity were ultimately based on a thoroughly biologistic doctrine of *Lebensraum* and racism; accordingly, the normativity at work in the Nazi system was, arguably, almost entirely reducible, and indeed rather literally reduced, to both the victims' and the perpetrators' racial and biological contingencies, such as the Germans' allegedly natural need for *Lebensraum* and the fact that the non-Aryan "lower races" of the East were on the way. As Holocaust writers like Primo Levi forcefully testify, the Nazis largely succeeded in reducing their victims into mere beasts, not merely by what they concretely did to them but also by using the kind of non-humanizing language they used (Levi 1988), while in a sense remaining human themselves, because remaining guilty and responsible for what they did. This reduction of human beings to mere animals is carefully analyzed in Holocaust literature, including Levi's compelling work.[15] But it required a philosophical-political analysis of the magnitude of

[14] Putnam (1999) persuasively argues that there is something seriously wrong in the temptation to think of the mind in terms of a (quasi-)scientific mystery in the first place. I agree, though I am not investigating the mind here, except in the extremely broad sense that normativity (naturally) requires mental or psychological creatures.

[15] On Levi's importance in the acknowledgment of the meaninglessness of suffering, see Pihlström 2020, chapter 6. In a Wittgensteinian analysis of Levi, Sparti (2005) argues that acknowledging others as humans, or the lack thereof, needs a form of life as its context – and my argument in this paper will come close to this line of thought. However, Sparti speaks about our *responsibility* of acknowledging others; again, the question is how (and when) such a normative responsibility arises. Doesn't it already need a normative context to be so much as possible? For a compelling analysis of the way in which the horror of the Holocaust moves us beyond language and the normative, see Cavarero 2018.

Hannah Arendt's to show what novel kind of crime the Nazi crime was. In Arendtian terms, the elimination of human *spontaneity* in totalitarianism (Arendt 1958) can be seen as a version of the reduction of normativity into mere natural factuality, or even non-human bestiality.

Our problem is that normativity is *irreducible but not non- or supernatural*. It is crucial to avoid both "bald naturalism" and "rampant Platonism", as John McDowell (1996) aptly calls them. This needs to be done across the board from logic and epistemology to ethics and political philosophy.[16]

Recognition

Let us move on to a slightly more detailed discussion of recognition as a ground of normativity. I am not seeking to offer any comprehensive account of contemporary recognition theory; my remarks may be understood as critical suggestions that would, I think, have to be addressed by anyone who proposes recognition as a "natural" (socio-)psychological ground of normativity, but this is compatible with acknowledging that contemporary recognition theorists themselves would only rarely do so.

My worry with the notion of recognition in this context, as already hinted at above, is that it may be too psychologizing and, hence, also naturalistically "factualizing" a concept to be able to account for the possibility of normativity in a sufficiently deep transcendental sense.[17] In its own way, recognition theory may seem to reduce normative

[16] McDowell's (1996) notion of "second nature" might also be helpful here (cf. Pihlström 2003, 2005), but if so, it also needs, for our purposes, to be *transcendentally* (as well as pragmatically) articulated, with normativity naturally based on (but not reduced to) our on-going critical self-reflection, focusing on our constant failure to follow the norms and rules that govern our lives. (A "via negativa" method is at work here, again.) This approach might come close to Korsgaard's (1996) Kantian account of procedural normativity. Having dealt with McDowell's (and, more briefly, Korsgaard's) views on earlier occasions (Pihlström 2005, chapters 2-3), I won't dwell on this issue here, while I warmly agree with his understanding of the ethical as "a domain of rational requirements" to which we are "alerted" by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities through enculturating upbringing (see McDowell 1996, 82), and with his antireductionist view that nothing non-normative can ground or justify the normative.

[17] There can be no brief answer to the question (raised by one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper) why I am including pragmatism in my "relaxed" articulation of transcendental philosophy while excluding recognition theory, which might seem to have a much more intimate connection with German idealism and hence with the transcendental tradition than pragmatism does. The only obvious reason is that I see recognition theory as, *qua* Hegelian, giving up at least one basic idea of transcendental inquiry, i.e., transcendental idealism, while I see pragmatism as a Kantian approach precisely in its attempts to rearticulate transcendental idealism in a "naturalized" and historicized shape. (The same goes for the later Wittgenstein as a transcendental thinker; cf. Pihlström 2003.) Moreover, my criticism of recognition theory is restricted to the understanding of recognition as basically psychological and socio-psychological action; insofar as this perhaps overly psychologistic characterization of recognition theory is inaccurate, I am pleased to welcome recognition theory as a contribution to a (quasi-)transcendental analysis of the possibility of normativity, too.

structures to our *acts* of recognition, that is, something that we as contingent psychological and social individuals "naturally" do (or fail to do). As a further approximation of our problem, consider now this question: could there be a *duty* to recognize (say, someone as something) if one just doesn't "feel" the compelling demand coming from the other's point of view, such as their request for recognition, as *already* binding in any sense? The vocabulary of duties, it seems to me, would come too early here. The mere availability of such a question shows that recognition cannot be the ultimate ground of moral duty, or any duty. Or consider, again, this: if there was a *first* act of recognition, was it an idealization like the Hobbesian sovereign arising from a state of nature, or Rawlsian justice emerging from an original position behind the veil of ignorance? Such an idealized postulation would in my view put the cart before the horse precisely because recognition is too contingent to account for normativity at a transcendental level, or for the grounding of the normative order in our natural psycho-social characteristics and (merely factually conceived) human nature. (The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for any other psychological or natural, generally non-normative, attempts to account for the grounding of normativity.)

A practice of recognition is, indeed, a *practice*. We need a well functioning set of already normatively structured and established human practices in order for there to be acts of recognition at all. Systematic recognition theory (cf., e.g., Koskinen 2017, 2019) analyzes those practices and the concepts they invoke in great philosophical detail and with admirable sophistication, but as far as I can see it cannot *ground* the normative order as such (nor is it, I suppose, necessarily taken to, though, unless recognition is proposed as *the* fundamental concept in social ontology).[18] Yet somehow norms undeniably *do* arise out of our natural ways of doing things. I would be inclined to analyze this phenomenon in terms of our "naturally" occupying or engaging in always already (for us) *irreducibly normative forms of life* (Wittgenstein), or *practices* (pragmatism). But the question remains: *how* do these forms of life or practices get their distinctive normativity? From recognition acts perhaps – but by whom, and based on what?

In a sense, recognition shares the problem of naturalism and cultural relativism: the worry is that it ultimately amounts to a "refactualization" of the normative order. It functions very well as "social glue" and is arguably *ontologically* constitutive of the social world as we

[18] Again, let me emphasize that my criticism is not primarily directed at contemporary recognition theory – which might indeed have received sufficiently transcendental elaborations by its practitioners – but at a *temptation* to employ this theory in an attempt to ground normativity in contingent acts of recognition.

know it, but it cannot *transcendentally* function as the necessary condition for the possibility of normativity. This is because there must already be a rich context of normative statuses at work in order for any act of recognition (i.e., recognizing, or failing to recognize, such statuses) to be so much as possible. This can be explicated by means of transcendental argumentation. In order for us to be able to recognize, or fail to recognize, anything whatsoever, in any sense stronger than a mere natural reaction (in principle available to "mere animals"), as having a normative status of any kind, we must already live in a normative order, a space of reasons. This is comparable to the way in which we, according to Kant, need a system of categories already in place for us to be able to have cognitive experience of any object or event – rather than a mere Humean "rhapsody" of sense impressions. Recognition can no more *ground* the possibility of normativity than the Kantian categories (as normative requirements for objecthood) can be grounded by or derived from (Humean) experience, or Wittgensteinian rules of using language within a language-game from mere marks and noises. Any theory finding recognition foundational for morality and normativity is therefore (in an extremely broad sense) "Humean" rather than Kantian.[19]

Let us elaborate on the problems and prospects of the notion of recognition in this context by taking a slightly more detailed look at a recent investigation of the topic developing and applying the original insights of Axel Honneth (2005) and other pioneers of the theory. In their introduction to the valuable new volume, *Recognition and Religion* (2019),[20] Maijastina Kahlos, Heikki J. Koskinen, and Ritva Palmén emphasize the relevance of recognition theory to the issue of normativity by reminding us that in contemporary recognition theory, recognition in its most relevant sense means that "to recognize someone is to grant another human being a positive normative status based on her personhood" (1). "On the most general level", therefore, a recognition act "means taking and treating the other *as a person*" (ibid., 1). When this is specified, "particular aspects of personhood" are brought into the picture, and then we can, following Honneth's seminal theory, distinguish between respect, esteem, and love (focusing on general human dignity, specific identities, and unique individual personhood, respectively) as the main dimensions of recognition (ibid., 1-2).

The editors continue to label recognition "a fundamental normative phenomenon" and to suggest that it "constitutes an adequate *response* to specific aspects of personhood" and

[19] In addition to being Hegelian, of course. There is a sense in which my discussion here parallels Kantian criticisms of Humean accounts of ethics based on sympathy. Cf. again Kivistö & Pihlström 2020.

[20] This book is a rich collection of essays ranging from various historical explorations to theological and philosophical analyses of recognition phenomena in different historical and systematic contexts.

may even play a crucial role "in the very *constitution* of general personhood, as well as more specific aspects of it" (ibid., 2). While the paradigmatic case of recognition is "a mutual granting of positive statuses between individual human persons", recognition extends to social groups as well as "normative entities quite generally" (ibid., 2). Fortunately, we are also reminded that although recognition is generally positive and a "vital human need", it has a "darker side" due to misrecognitions, power relations, and the need to "struggle" for recognition (cf. again Honneth 2005). Kahlos, Koskinen, and Palmén also take what we may call a "realistic" attitude to recognition by claiming that though it was Hegel whose work signals a turning point in the development of recognition theory, "the phenomena themselves were already present before their conceptual articulation by Hegel", because recognition is, indeed, a "basic human need" and presumably even constitutive of human persons and their identities (Kahlos et al. 2019, 4).[21]

Given the task of this paper, we again need to ask *how* "fundamental", exactly, recognition is as a normative phenomenon. One obvious question related to this general issue is how far the recognition theorist needs to go in the direction of realism. Would it be possible to maintain that recognition "phenomena" are, though "real", themselves something constituted (e.g., by further recognition acts)? They are themselves social phenomena, after all. This is a more general question regarding realism about the normative (as well as about historical social facts and institutions). In this context, however, a possibly more serious philosophical question can be formulated on the basis of the overview of normativity sketched above. No matter how "fundamental" recognition is as a "normative phenomenon", it can be claimed that it is only *possible* within a context that is itself already richly normative. Perhaps the recognition theorist seeks to emphasize such irreducible normativity by suggesting that social reality is constituted by recognition acts, but my transcendental worry is that the very identity of those acts as recognition acts (rather than acts of some other kind) already presupposes a normative context.

Another issue the above-quoted comments raise is related to the strong emphasis on personhood among many recognition theorists. Does the world, we may ask, somehow divide itself up to, e.g., persons and non-persons already prior to recognition acts? Or do those acts (as is occasionally suggested) *constitute* persons (etc.) in a strong ontological sense?[22] But then how

[21] Saarinen's (2016) historically detailed study also emphasizes that in theological and religious contexts recognition has been conceptualized in the history a long time before Hegel.

[22] Would our recognizing another as a person constitute their personhood also if we (or just I?) recognized animals, machines (artificial intelligence, robots), Martians, or the replicas familiar from the film *Blade Runner* as persons? Where would, or could, we draw the line?

is it determined what kinds of things *can* through recognition acts be turned into persons? Some kind of "pre-recognition" must arguably have taken place for *relevant kinds of beings* to be even potentially recognizable as persons rather than something else. This, in turn, presupposes criteria of relevance that must, again, already be regarded as normative. Therefore, there just is no way to ground normativity in mere psychological acts of recognition, or contingent psychological acts of any kind.

Recognizing other human beings as persons, Koskinen (2019, 36) notes, involves acknowledging "their normative status as persons". Koskinen also refers to Robert Brandom's notion of "robust recognition", "the practical attitude of recognizing another as a simple recognizer", "as itself the kind of thing for which things can have a specifically normative significance" (ibid., 40). However, as recognition theorists like Koskinen of course clearly acknowledge, the normative form of life we share with other human beings may require (or even normatively obligate) us to recognize human beings for whom things do not, and cannot, have any normative significance because they lack the capacity to attribute such, or any, significance to anything. When Brandom and Koskinen characterize interpersonal recognition as an act of "[t]aking something to be subject to appraisals of its reasons, holding it rationally responsible" and thus of "treating it as some*one*: as one of *us* (rational beings)" (ibid., 42, quoting Brandom), the immediate issue that arises is how we should account for our recognizing human beings who are *not* persons, and not, except perhaps potentially but (tragically) not actually, among "us", such as the permanently ill or severely mentally disabled?

It is, I would like to argue, only within an always already normative context guided by something like (among others) the idea of *human dignity* – or some suitably general and irreducibly normative equivalent – that we can so much as *ask* whether, and how exactly, our various acts of recognition, or our failures to commit such acts, are appropriate or inappropriate, acknowledging or constituting relevant normative statuses. Dignity is transcendentally presupposed by any consideration of recognition vs. non- or misrecognition. It is, in short, only within a human form of life that is already thoroughly ethical and normative that we can discuss whether, and how, to recognize someone or something as something (and why). If this is the case, the human form of life in its normative dimensions *just cannot arise*

from (mere) recognition. We must be human in order for us to be able to engage in recognition acts.[23]

In my view, these remain open issues; this paper admittedly raises more questions than it provides answers to. It is, in any event, unclear to what extent recognition is (or is even claimed by recognition theorists like Koskinen to be) a "fundamental" normative phenomenon in the sense that it could be taken to ground the normative order we live in, or the human form of life as such. I have suggested that contingent recognition acts are less fundamental than our already finding ourselves committed to and guided by normativity, because we need to so conceptualize our lives in order to be able to engage in any such acts in the first place. Therefore, normative statuses cannot be ultimately constituted by such recognition acts. But I also acknowledge the possibility that recognition theory might actually seek to express the kind of notion of dignity that I am invoking, because the affirmation of dignity as normatively foundational may itself be regarded as a recognition act.[24] If so, then recognition theory would already presuppose normativity more or less along the lines suggested in this paper – in which case the transcendental criticism of recognition would lose much of its relevance.

Be that as it may, recognition is arguably slightly less fundamental than we might be tempted to think, but we should be open to elaborations of recognition theory that render it closer to the transcendental requirements for "grounding" I have emphasized here. Furthermore, one might, in Wittgensteinian terms, also argue that recognition acts are always (for better or worse) somehow "reasoned" or "ratiocinated", while our being committed to normativity in general is, rather, based on "blind" rule-following, on our being "naturally" (though obviously not in the sense of reductive naturalism) engaged in the kind of practices within which our language-games find their homes.[25] A pragmatist (Peircean) version of this criticism would emphasize that particular recognition acts presuppose a wider context of habituality that is, again, already normatively structured.

In the remainder of this paper, I will try to further illuminate these issues by briefly returning to philosophical anthropology and then by taking a look at how "holistic pragmatism", a specific development of pragmatism, views the relation between the normative and the natural.

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[23] "Let us be human", Wittgenstein once wrote (1980, 36), perhaps indicating that being human is already a task, something that normatively challenges *us* (as humans) only from within a human form of life – otherwise the encouragement would hardly make sense. (This phrase, like many Wittgensteinian ones, is thus arguably much more complex than its apparent simplicity might lead us to think.)

[24] Thanks are due to one of the referees for this very important point.

[25] "Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination", Wittgenstein (1969, §475) writes.

Dignity and the threat of refactualization

In contrast to any position that defends, say, human equality (understood as ethical and/or political or more generally normative) or basic human rights on the basis of merely natural and contingent facts about human beings, I would be willing to suggest, drawing inspiration from Veikko Launis's (2018) recent work on human dignity, that the category of the human being, and the related category of human dignity, should be treated as more foundational than the category of the person, or the concept of "human rights".[26] I have argued above that our moral and generally normative reality cannot be transcendentally (regarding the conditions of its *possibility*) grounded in our acts of recognition even if such acts are constitutive of the normative and the social (and of personhood) in an ontological sense. In order for such acts themselves to be *possible*, we must, I have suggested, live in a thoroughly normative sphere in which we, for instance, evaluate any morally relevant acts and uses of language, including our recognizing behavior, in terms of our being *already* responsive to human dignity. This normative sphere is not reducible to contingent recognitions of personhood based on natural capacities, and it also invokes a notion of humanity wider than the category of the person, because we need to treat with dignity also those human beings who clearly lack the rational and other capacities of persons (e.g., deeply mentally disabled people). Our responsibility of treating others with dignity does not arise from our psychology or brain structure. It is, as Wittgensteinians might put it, *there* – "like our life".[27]

A worry that now rearises is whether our transcendental notion of human dignity, or any other normative notion we might use in a comparably fundamental (transcendental) normative role, is just a *cultural specificity* based on particular recognition acts we commit in our local cultural surroundings. Is it merely a local cultural practice, ultimately reducible to mere facts about what we in this specific culture do, to treat other human beings as equal?[28] This question brings us back to the issue concerning the relation between normativity and "human nature". Is there a kind of normativity already in place that enables us to, for example, ask the question whether it is our moral duty to avoid sexism or racism, or does our contingent

[26] Launis's (2018) comprehensive work on human dignity is available only in Finnish. On the irreducible significance of the notion of the (other) human being in our lives, see, e.g., Gaita 2000.

[27] Cf. Wittgenstein 1969. In this sense, Sparti's (2005) way of speaking about the "responsibility" for acknowledging as more fundamental than acknowledging itself sounds somewhat problematic (and, despite his Wittgensteinian approach, curiously non-Wittgensteinian).

[28] This could be taken to be a problem analogous to the issue of epistemic and/or scientific norms of rationality being based on the contingent reasonings by scientists and other inquirers in specific historical contexts.

recognizing the normative statuses of (say) women and people representing "other" ethnic backgrounds create any normativity there is in matters like this? We are back in basic issues of philosophical anthropology all over again.

Returning to Kannisto's (1984) scheme briefly introduced above, we may recall that cultural relativism is a natural development of culturalism, with the alarming tendency to "refactualize" the culture-specific normative order. Even if "we" in our culture do recognize women and non-white people, for instance, as fundamentally equal to white men, and if we set this recognition as a universal model to be carried over into other cultures as well, are we still only dealing with a local specificity that can ultimately be reduced to a mere contingent fact about how we behave and how we happen to think others ought to behave, too? How exactly should the relation between the natural and the cultural (or the contingently factual and the normative) be understood?

Pragmatism, as pointed out above, is an attempt to bridge the gap between the natural and the cultural, and therefore we should, before concluding the discussion, take a quick look at a promising pragmatist way of dealing with normativity.[29]

Holistic pragmatism and normativity

One suggestion for a way of developing a pragmatist philosophical anthropology entangling naturalism and normativity is Morton White's (1956, 2002) *holistic pragmatism*, which is basically an epistemological position but can be extended to a more general account of the "human form of life" (cf. Pihlström 2011, 2015). In a Quinean manner, White labels his pragmatism "holistic"; indeed, like his long-time friend and colleague W.V. Quine, he follows the anti-Cartesian and more generally anti-rationalist line of pragmatist thought (White 2002, 3-5), abandoning any "first philosophy". The distinctive character of White's position naturally emerges against the background of Quine's more extreme (and better known) views. While both Quine and White begin from a firm rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction and from the holistic idea that our beliefs (or sentences we assent to) are not tested individually but "face

[29] Another relevant pragmatist approach *not* to be explored here would be Rorty's *ethnocentrism*, according to which we just have to "start from where we are", i.e., where we contingently find ourselves, and develop our "vocabularies" with the "ironic" awareness of the contingency of that starting point. We should not, I think, assess Rorty's pragmatism purely negatively; his emphasis on the historical contingency of our most fundamental normative frameworks is, I think, to be taken very seriously. I am, however, looking for a pragmatist account that would be reconcilable with a transcendental inquiry into normativity, and here Rorty seems to of little help – a form of pragmatism more responsive to the transcendental "vocabulary" is needed.

the tribunal of experience" in corporate bodies, they draw quite different morals from this picture.

Whereas philosophy of science was, for Quine, "philosophy enough", White recommends that we extend holism from the philosophy of science to *philosophy of culture*, thematizing not only science but also other normative practices, such as religion, history, art, law, and morality (ibid., x-xi). This "cultural philosophy" covers philosophy of science as one of its subfields, but White insists that other cultural institutions require empirically informed philosophical scrutiny no less than science does (ibid., xiii). Holistic pragmatism maintains that "philosophy of art, of religion, of morality, or of other elements of culture is in great measure a discipline that is epistemically coordinate with philosophy of natural science" (ibid., 66). The idea that ethics, in particular, may be viewed as "empirical" if one includes feelings of moral obligation as well as empirical experiences in the "flux" of experience employed in the on-going critical testing of one's beliefs has been strongly present in White's writings from an early stage to the present (see White 1956, 1981, 2002). White is thus one of those philosophers who can be read as having defended a pragmatic form of moral and generally normative realism (cf. Pihlström 2005).

Quine (1953) took his famous holistic step by arguing that even logical truths are not immune to revision, because they are tested along with factual claims as components of larger conjunctions of statements (White 2002, 71). No general analytic/synthetic division can be drawn, as statements about, say, the synonymity of terms are ultimately empirical, describing the contingencies of factual language-use (ibid., 71, 73). Despite this fundamental agreement with Quine, White argues against Quine that "observation sentences" (e.g., "That's a rabbit") and ethical sentences such as "That's outrageous" cannot be sharply separated from each other any more than analytic and synthetic statements can; their difference is a matter of degree, not a difference in kind (ibid., 154-155, 160-163). Yet, ethical sentences at issue are genuinely normative:

> Avoiding the view that ethical sentences are synonymous with sociological or psychological sentences, and being impressed by the failure of reductive phenomenalism as well as the power of holism to bridge the traditional epistemic gap created by the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic, I propose a nonreductive version of holism in order to bridge the gap between the moral and the descriptive […]. (Ibid., 157.)

That is, descriptive statements and normative ethical principles form conjunctions that are tested holistically, just as Quine had argued that empirical and logico-mathematical beliefs in science are. Logic, science, and ethics form a unified whole, a holistic web without epistemic dichotomies. Moreover, as logical principles *may*, by Quinean lights, be given up in the face of sufficiently recalcitrant experience, descriptive statements *may* be denied in order to preserve a normative principle we do not want to give up (ibid., 159), although such situations may be rare. Hence, ethics is not immune to empirical evaluation, as feelings of obligation together with sensory observation link ethical sentences to the natural world. *Pace* Quine, ethics is, then, "anchored in experience" (ibid., 160). Furthermore, "feeling sentences" are fallible and can also be surrendered when a conjunction is tested (ibid., 166). Both ethics and science are, hence, corrigible yet cognitive elements of normatively structured human culture that in the end constitutes a holistic totality instead of any compartmentalized group of distinct areas with definite boundaries. Knowledge and morals, as White himself put it many years ago, form a "seamless web" (White 1956, 287).

As an example of holistic pragmatism at work, consider the following argument:

(1) One can be morally responsible for one's actions (or have moral duties) only if one acts freely (i.e., is a genuine agent).
(2) One can act freely only if one possesses free will.
(3) Only individuals (can) have wills.
(4) Therefore, groups and collectives (e.g., business corporations) cannot have a will.
(5) Therefore, groups (etc.) cannot act freely and are not genuine agents.
(6) Therefore, groups (etc.) cannot be morally responsible.
(7) Therefore, there is no such thing as moral/social responsibility, nor any moral duties, attributed to business corporations.

Now, according to holistic pragmatism, if we find the normative conclusion ethically unacceptable, we may legitimately revise or reject one of the factual premises. Thus, if we find it ethically impossible to maintain, e.g., that business corporations cannot be responsible for their actions (or that we should not attribute such responsibility to them), we may revise our picture of what (their) agency (including freedom, the will, etc.), or agency generally, *is*. The revised picture of agency must then also be made compatible with the rest of our beliefs. Moreover, we must provide further reasons for the thoroughly normative ethical "impossibility" motivating this belief revision. There is, then, at least potentially, an endless

process of *mutual holistic normative adjustment* of beliefs and evidence here – like in any empirical inquiry, yet extending to the fully normative sphere.In comparison, consider this argument: (1) Racism is true. (2) If racism is true, then racial discrimination is justified. (3) Therefore, racial discrimination is justified. Now, to reject (3), we need not merely find purely theoretical or evidential reasons to reject (1). We may reject (1) because (3) cannot *work* as an element of our overall holistic system of belief within the human form of life we find ourselves to be inhabiting. Our reason for rejecting a factual belief like (1) may be thoroughly normative, and holistic pragmatism makes sense of this.

I would be happy to construe these ideas somewhat more metaphysically as yielding the claim that there are, for us, no "value-neutral" facts at all (see Pihlström 2005, 2010), though I doubt that White himself ever intended them in such a metaphysical sense.[30] In any case, White's holism could be extended from the epistemic justification of different kinds of *statements* (sentences) or *beliefs* to whatever is the equivalent of such normative justification in the critical evaluation of entire cultural *practices* and normatively governed *institutions*. While remaining distinct from each other, such practices (e.g., science, politics, religion, art, and others) are dynamically interrelated and must therefore be evaluated holistically. A continuous critical (re)consideration of the normative structures that constitute our (thoroughly and irreducibly normative) form of life is precisely what holistic pragmatism calls for, and indeed makes sense of.

Another extension for holistic pragmatism is also needed because White's version is, arguably, *too thin*. Mere *feelings* of obligation are, again, just natural and contingent. Normative commitment to feeling-transcendent rational duty (in a quasi-Kantian sense) needs to be built into the holistic assessment of our normative-cum-factual belief systems. Moral emotions and even "mere" feelings do have a role to play here, but they cannot alone act as the epistemic ground for our moral commitments. And the same goes for more general normativity. This, however, would be a topic for another essay.

Conclusion: humanism

Holistic pragmatism is of course only one suggestion designed to meet our needs of defending the normative human form of life against reductively naturalizing (or "factualizing")

[30] White, like Putnam (2002), is strongly opposed to any metaphysical ("inflated") version of the fact-value entanglement. *This* might be seen as a remnant of logical positivism, too.

tendencies, just as recognition theory has above been examined only as an example of an approach we might be tempted to employ in an attempt to ground normativity in natural human capabilities and actions. In addition to "positive" suggestions seeking to articulate a pragmatist philosophical anthropology integrating (soft) naturalism and culturalism, it is at least equally important to engage in a "negative" critical examination of well-intended yet (in my view) insufficiently deeply normative proposals such as recognition theory. Let me now close with brief general remarks.

A defense of a normative order is – as my frequent references to the human "form of life" might also suggest – also a defense of a kind of *humanism*, even rather traditional Enlightenment humanism, with a reincarnation of the transcendental subject at its center, a subject self-reflectively examining its capacities and limits. This defense operates at a transcendental level: anti-, trans-, and post-humanism are all human beings' attempts to reflect on their relation to pre-established social and cultural hierarchies, non-human nature, animals, intelligent machines, etc. – to something non-human. A kind of *transcendental humanism* thus ultimately prevails, because any such criticisms of traditional humanism (just like any acts of recognition or arguments concerning whom to recognize, as what, and why) must inevitably take place within a space of reasons and thus within the human normative order. Only transcendental humanism makes empirical anti- or posthumanisms possible, analogously to the way in which for Kant it is only transcendental idealism that can make empirical realism possible.[31] Moreover, it is precisely on the basis of transcendental humanism that we can see the issue of normativity as inescapably – holistically – intertwined with the philosophical-anthropological question about what the human being is like.

I have argued for these conclusions by employing a negative philosophical method. In a more comprehensive discussion, it would be important to analyze critically not only the horrible cases of the elimination or reduction of normativity to mere nature, such as the Nazis' reduction of the Jews to stateless and normless animals, to a kind of dehumanized indifference (cf. Levi 1988, Cavarero 2018), but also more "positive" reductionisms, such as the tendency to see the basis of morality in natural phenomena such as emotions.[32] The

[31] For these same humanistic reasons, I do not think the transcendental defense of dignity considered above extends to, say, non-human animals. But as our form of life changes, we might have to redefine what counts as "us", or even as humans. Even then, this would be a human change, and a human redefining process, in principle to be accounted for in terms of transcendental humanism.

[32] Analyses of the Nazi tendency to destroy the human (and thus normative) status of their victims, such as Cavarero's (2018), would benefit from an explicitly transcendental approach. For example, the very unforgiveability of the Nazi crimes may be seen as a transcendental insight into what the Nazis did: "Wherever

affirmation of human equality and dignity is, I have suggested, more fundamental than any contingent natural reactions (such as recognition) or any empirical evidence for or against contingent states of affairs. The commitment to valuing dignity *constitutes the normative sphere* within which (only) we can engage in the practice of discussing *anything* ethically or normatively at all.[33] Hence it cannot be defended (or criticized) by means of empirical evidence; it is more fundamental (like religious belief is for some Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion), albeit not in principle non-revisable or infallible. Thus, we could definitely end up in a dystopic world rejecting human dignity, though it would be difficult for us to (now) include ourselves in that potential "we" that would have lost the transcendental framework of dignity inescapably characterizing our form of life. Moreover, holistic pragmatism reminds us that the boundary between the natural and the normative is itself constantly holistically tested and may historically change. Nothing, not even our normatively structured form of life conceived as a holistic totality, is beyond pragmatic critical transformation. This critical fallibilist spirit is itself inherent to humanism and to the normative framework that humanism defines.

Furthermore, it may also be acknowledged, at the meta-level, that transcendental inquiry into normativity is in an important sense *optional*; one *can* avoid it and engage in what I have called "naturalizing reduction" (or, less reductively, recognition theory) instead. In a sense the reductionist approach would, if my argument is on the right track, be somewhat like living in a transcendental illusion. Yet, such an illusion is visible *only from within*, i.e., only when we have made a transcendental turn and committed to an "internal" analysis of normativity as constitutive of our lives. So whether the transcendental perspective *is* optional or not is a question receiving different answers depending on whether we have adopted that perspective or not. This reintroduces the relativism and refactualization issues all over again: our adopting the transcendental perspective in our inquiries is itself historically contingent, a

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the human is injured, human beings can neither forgive nor punish this radical offense to the human as such." (Ibid., 139.) It is self-evident that the Nazis had their own normative system, but a transcendental analysis may point out how deeply they were engaged in the dehumanizing project of destroying their victims' normative statuses – including the language in terms of which their human form of life had been meaningful to them. (For transcendental engagements with the problem of suffering, see Kivistö & Pihlström 2016.)

[33] This could be regarded as a reformulation of what I have elsewhere called "pragmatic moral realism" based on a transcendental argument (Pihlström 2005). Again, the recognition theorist could respond that making *this* claim is itself an act of recognition. There is no need to deny this, but one way of rephrasing my point is to suggest that the "always already" presupposed acknowledgment of normativity as a transcendentally pervasive feature of the human world may (when analyzed from an external perspective provided by, say, recognition theory) be realized as empirical (factual) acts of recognition, just as our transcendental self can be seen as identical to our empirical psychological self (i.e., not as an ontologically additional entity on top of the natural world). Cf. again Pihlström 2003, 2016.

local fact of the matter concerning our de facto processes of inquiry. And so it goes: the transcendental inquirer cannot avoid working within a kind of endlessly reflexive spiral.

A final note is needed. The transcendental problem concerning the very possibility of normativity is, we should admit, a philosophical mystery deep enough to make it understandable (albeit not for that reason justifiable) that some of us think it cannot be solved without reference to something *transcendent*.[34] However, the transcendental humanist maintains that even by making such a move we cannot get rid of our inescapably human starting point. Even theism would not liberate us from the *burden* of humanism and the puzzlement about normativity. Normativity is an enigma *for us*. In philosophical-anthropological terms, a culturalist (humanist) view of the irreducible normativity of the human world is in a constant danger of collapsing into either cosmic transcendent teleology (classical or Christian) or refactualizing naturalism and/or cultural relativism, or perhaps the individual contingency of existentialism.[35] Transcendental humanism is needed at the meta-level to guide our search for plausible accounts defined by these open issues, and especially to guard us against too easy solutions.[36]

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[34] Taylor (1989), for example, ultimately places his account of "strong evaluation" in a theistic context; cf. Pihlström 2011 for some critical remarks on the relation between the transcendental and the transcendent.
[35] I examine these worries in more detail in Pihlström 2016.
[36] I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers as well as many of the participants of the I.I.P. Entretiens at the University of Helsinki (August, 2019) for highly valuable critical comments on this paper.

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